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Earlier this year, Russia's Ministry of Justice established a new body called the Expert Council on Religious Studies that is said to have "unprecedented powers" to suggest policies to control religious groups, according to the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**.

USCIRF chair Leonard Leo believed the chair of the Expert Council, Aleksandr Dvorkin, is said to be Russia's most prominent "anti-cult" activists; and under the leadership by Dvorkin, he said some fear that the Council will close registered organizations, such as the Evangelical Protestant community, and unregistered minority religious communities like the Council of Churches Baptists.

The move prompted **USCIRF** to add Russia to its watch list for the first time despite having monitored the country's religious freedom for ten years.